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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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HaQaretz quoted decision-makers in Jerusalem as saying that Israel would continue to launch pinpoint strikes against Hamas and other Palestinian militant organizations in Gaza. Yesterday Israeli aircraft wounded 10 Palestinians in the attempted killing of a Hamas operative in southern Gaza. Palestinian militants launched two

Qassam rockets and one mortar round into Israel, resulting in no casualties or damage. HaQaretz reported that Hizbullah, meanwhile, has vowed to strike Israeli targets, and that on Wednesday Cypriot authorities detained an Iranian arms ship that Israel believes may have been en route to Hizbullah.

All media highlighted a diplomatic incident yesterday at the World Economic Forum in Davos: Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan stormed off the stage after verbally sparring with President Shimon Peres over the recent fighting in Gaza. Erdogan was angry after being cut off by a panel moderator after listening to an impassioned monologue by Peres defending Israel's recent 22-day offensive against Hamas in Gaza. Erdogan declared to Peres: "You are killing people." A finger-pointing Peres told Erdogan that he would have done the same if rockets had been falling on Istanbul. Israel Radio quoted diplomatic sources in Ankara as saying that there likely won't be direct consequences to the incident, but that the Jewish lobby in Washington may stop preventing the characterization by the U.S. of the 1915 killing of Armenians by Turkey as Qgenocide.Q The radio also said that the row may spark a comparison between Hamas and the PKK as well as help Erdogan in the upcoming Turkish elections.

Israel Radio reported that the U.S. expressed concern for the civilian casualties on both sides in the conflict in the Gaza Strip and called to provide humanitarian aid for Gazan residents and assist in the region's relief. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice was quoted as saying at a UN Security Council meeting that Washington expected Israel to stand by its commitment to inquire whether it abided by international law in the course of the fighting. That said, Rice stressed that many accusations had been launched against Israel with no intention other than to inflame public opinion. She added that Hamas had violated international law by firing rockets on civilian towns in Israel. She said that Hamas members also hid in civilian facilities in order to protect themselves. Rice noted that the Obama administration was taking a new approach to the UN and did not automatically suspect it of fostering hostility toward Israel. Leading media reported that yesterday the UN launched an emergency appeal for \$613 million to help Palestinians recover from Israel's offensive.

Israel Radio reported that 60 Democratic members of the US House of Representatives called on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to allow emergency support for the UN's agency for refugees in Gaza, UNRWA, so that it will be able to begin providing relief after the destruction caused by the fighting. The Congress members are also requesting that Israel allow Palestinians who were badly injured in the course of the fighting to receive medical treatment in the PA or Jordan.

HaQaretz and other media quoted Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu as saying yesterday that he would not be bound by PM Olmert's commitments to evacuate West Bank settlements and withdraw from the territories.

All media reported that yesterday a Spanish judge decided to open a probe of seven former top security officials -- including then defense minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, IAF commander Dan Halutz, and Shin Bet head Avi Dichter-- for alleged war crimes in the 2002 bombing in Gaza that killed top Hamas terrorist Salah Shehadeh as well as 14 other people. The media cited Israel's anger over the decision, and reported that it is considering appealing the move. In another development, HaQaretz reported that Israeli leftists have begun drawing up a Qblacklist of army officers involved in the recent operation in Gaza, in response to the military censor's decision to ban the publication of their names, pictures, or other identifying details.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that 300,00 Jews now live in the West Bank, a 50,000 increase during Olmert's tenure.

All media reported that Pope Benedict XVI's decision to reinstate four ultra-conservative clerics has sparked a conflict with Israel's Chief Rabbinate and other institutions. Two of those bishops have denied the Holocaust.

Maariv presented the results of a TNS/Teleseker poll on voting intentions for the Knesset elections (In brackets: Maariv's January 23 poll):

QIf elections were held today, for which party would you vote?

Likud: 28 (28); Kadima: 23 (24); Labor: 17 (16); Yisrael Beiteinu: 16 (16); Shas: 10 (9); Meretz: 6 (6); United Torah Judaism: 5 (6); National Religious Party-Jewish Home: 4 (4); Arab parties: 8 (11); National Union: 3 (2); 70.3% percent of respondents declared their intention to vote.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited the results of a Shvakim-Panorama survey claiming that Likud leads Kadima by 9 Knesset seats:  
:Likud: 29; Kadima: 20; Labor: 16; Yisrael Beiteinu: 16; Shas: 11; United Torah Judaism: 7; Meretz: 4); National Religious Party-Jewish Home: 3); Arab parties: 9; National Union: 3.

Several media reported that many United Torah Judaism voters are shifting to Shas.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QObama is not seeking long, interminable processes such as the Roadmap. He doesnQt believe in conflict management, but in agreements and a resolution mechanism.

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer and others wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIt was said yesterday in Gaza that the cancellation of Barak's trip to the United States was another indication that Israel was preparing for a massive reprisal, but that George Mitchell's presence in the region had caused a delay.

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/30): QAlthough diplomatic sources said it was clear the new Obama administration would stand by [President BushQs 2004] letter [to Ariel Sharon], this did not mean that the United StatesQ recognition of changing realities on the ground meant it accepted Israel's interpretation of this.  
Jerrold Kessel and Pierre Kochendler, Jerusalem-based reporters and documentary filmmakers, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q[President Obama should] act now, by speaking out now, definitely in advance of the February 10 Israeli elections. It's time for plain speaking from friends.

HaQaretz editorialized: QIt is not possible to demand that the Palestinians demonstrate transparency in their battle against the infrastructure of terror while at the same time throwing sand in the world's eyes over the deepening of the occupation's infrastructure.

Shmuel Rosner wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QObamaQs entourage swears that he is not seeking a row with Netanyahu.

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: QInstead of President ObamaQs envoy presenting an outline of negotiations, the Israeli Prime Minister is presenting one of its own. The U.S. administration will therefore likely embrace this outline as its own.

Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal and reporter Amir Buhbut wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: Q[A] letter [that President Obama will send the Iranian leadership] is the direct outcome of a series of positive declarations on both sides over the past two months.

Block Quotes:  
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1I. QNo Nonsense

Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/30): QMitchell wonQt try to do to the Palestinians and

Israel what he did in Northern Ireland. However, his nomination is the new administration's key message: Obama is not seeking long, interminable processes such as the Roadmap. He doesn't believe in conflict management, but in agreements and a resolution mechanism. Obama is not exactly a person consumed by doubts about himself.... [Mitchell] is not one of Bush's rotating generals, but the real thing. Q the Qreal McCoy, Q as they say in America. He doesn't empathize with Hamas. Judging from his comments two years ago, he has no intention of breaking the line of Hamas-boycotting, unless it recognizes Israel's right to exist.

## II. QOlmert: Disproportionate Response to Hamas's Actions in Gaza

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer and others wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/30): QFollowing the attack in which an IDF soldier was killed Tuesday and the firing of two Qassam rockets in the past couple of days, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert supports a harsh and disproportionate response. The Prime Minister believes that Israel must respond disproportionately to every incident of fire from the Gaza Strip as well as to every Hamas attempt at arms smuggling. Hamas fears Israel's response and its organization's leaders have since returned to their hideouts. Yesterday the Prime Minister summoned the Foreign and Defense Ministers to discuss Israel's response to the attack and to the renewed smuggling and Qassam rocket fire. Behind closed doors Olmert said that Israel must not find itself getting into a war of attrition with Hamas. QIf necessary, the military will embark on a new campaign in Gaza, Q he said. Gaza is hearing these voices and getting the hint, and a war atmosphere has again descended on the city. Sources in Gaza said yesterday that Hamas leaders took seriously the threats of Shaul Mofaz who warned that as long as Gilad Shalit had not been returned, neither would Hamas leaders see the light of day. It was said yesterday in Gaza that the cancellation of Barak's trip to the United States was another indication that Israel was preparing for a massive reprisal, but that George Mitchell's presence in the region had caused a delay.

QThe U.S. and Israel Diverge on the Interpretation of Bush's 2004 Letter to Sharon

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/30): QAlthough diplomatic sources said it was clear the new Obama administration would stand by [President Bush's 2004] letter [to Ariel Sharon], this did not mean that the United States' recognition of changing realities on the ground meant it accepted Israel's interpretation of this to mean Washington would back the annexation of the large settlement blocs -- something the U.S. has never explicitly said. This topic is likely to come up on Friday morning when Mitchell meets Likud head Benjamin Netanyahu, who is expected to present Mitchell with a view of the diplomatic process significantly different from the one that Olmert presented.

## IV. QNew Rules of Engagement

Jerrold Kessel and Pierre Kochendler, Jerusalem-based reporters and documentary filmmakers, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/30): QThe Qtwo-state solutionQ is, in boxing terminology, about to be counted out, some say. More and more people maintain there's already been a count of Q10 and you're out. Acknowledging the urgency, President Barack Obama has been as good as his word, letting not a single day pass before taking action to demonstrate that the United States is reengaged to avert the knockout. But is it enough? It isn't. Obama needs to establish new rules of engagement. In dispatching George Mitchell as his special envoy to the region, the president said in an interview with the Al Arabiya network, he expects him to Qstart by listening, because ultimately we cannot tell the Israelis or the Palestinians what's best for them -- they're going to have to make some decisions.Q Yes, Obama can tell them. In fact, he should. Act now, by speaking out now, definitely in advance of the February 10 Israeli elections. It's time for plain speaking from friends. The war in Gaza has reaffirmed the legitimacy of Israel's acting to establish its deterrence. [But] Israel must be ready to commit to ending the occupation. Some will see this kind of Washington message as unwarranted interference in the elections. It is not: It's not telling Israelis for whom to vote. Nor is it pressure. Before they decide the direction they want their country to go and

their place in the region, it's simply letting Israelis know that this is where the U.S. has decided to stand -- this is its direction and its place in the region.

#### IV. QLike Two Hedgehogs Making Love

Shmuel Rosner wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/30): Q[In the nineties], the Americans fiercely endeavored to get rid of Netanyahu. This didnQt bring much good. The Obama administration wants to be wiser than ClintonQs. During the election campaign the president was caught making unnecessary statements Q he said that a Qpro-LikudQ approach was not needed to be a friend of Israel Q but he quickly regretted his words. ObamaQs entourage swears that he is not seeking a row with Netanyahu. He hopes that the bitter experience from the nineties has been useful to both sides: this time Netanyahu will be more careful about keeping good relations with the administration. Obama will not try to prove that he is stronger Q at least not at the beginning.

#### VI. QStop the Deceit and Whitewashing

HaQaretz editorialized (1/30): QAlmost four years after attorney Talia Sasson published a report exposing the cooperation, by commission and omission, of successive Israeli governments in the establishment of dozens of settlement outposts, an internal defense document reveals that even settlements deemed legal by Israel are in part, and sometimes in large part, effectively illegal outposts. The Defense Ministry's database documents illegal construction in more than 30 settlements, including veteran [ones].... This is not another report by Peace Now or another investigative report by the media. It is an official document, drafted by a retired senior officer, Baruch Spiegel, on orders from former defense minister Shaul Mofaz. It casts a heavy shadow over Israel's pro-peace statements, while raising questions about its official position that the Quse Israel makes of land for the settlements accords with all the rules and norms of international law. Privately-owned land has not been expropriated for the sake of establishing the settlementsQ.... It is not possible to demand that the Palestinians demonstrate transparency in their battle against the infrastructure of terror while at the same time throwing sand in the world's eyes over the deepening of the occupation's infrastructure. Or in the words of U.S. envoy George Mitchell's report from May 2001: The kind of security cooperation desired by the GOI [Government of Israel] cannot for long coexist with settlement activity.

#### VII. QUnbinding Commitments

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (1/30): QA recurring, malignant phenomenon is again invading IsraelQs diplomatic world: The outgoing Prime Minister is presenting an official American envoy Q this time, George Mitchell Q his governmentQs commitment to a permanent-status agreement as part of the negotiations. The problem created by the QOlmert legacyQ for the next government is not so much in the pledge that he gave. After all, no government decision approved this shelf agreement, neither did the Knesset. But what Olmert did was to make life easier for the Americans. Instead of President ObamaQs envoy presenting an outline of negotiations, the Israeli Prime Minister is presenting one of its own. The U.S. administration will therefore likely embrace this outline as its own.

#### VIII. QObamaQs New Friend: Ahmadinejad

Europe correspondent Nadav Eyal and reporter Amir Buhbut wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/30): QSenior Obama administration officials have drafted a letter that the President is supposed to send to the Iranian leadership, in a first attempt to thaw taut relations between Washington and Tehran. It is still unclear at this time whether the recipient of the letter will be spiritual leader Ali Khamenei or President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The letter is the direct outcome of a series of positive declarations on both sides over the past two months. [This being said], a senior Israeli defense source said yesterday regarding the location of an Iranian ship suspected of carrying weapons for Hamas. QThe Americans are monitoring the ship, but since it travels under the flag of Cyprus, it cannot be stopped and searched. The IraniansQ very willingness and ability to transfer weaponry to Hamas is evidence of the level of sanctions that were imposed on Iran.

